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## **Society and Culture of Pakistan**

### **Learning Outcomes**

- Explain Pakistan's social and cultural diversity.
- Understand the roles of languages and literature in cultural identity.
- Examine religion and everyday cultural practices.
- Assess diversity, integration and national identity.

### **Pakistan as a Plural Society**

#### **Society, Culture and Diversity**

Pakistan is a multicultural society in which people have several forms of belonging. People may identify with Pakistan as a country while also having strong regional, linguistic, religious and cultural identities. These identities exist together within the same state. Diversity is therefore a normal and important part of Pakistani society. It can be seen in the languages people speak, the regions they come from, the traditions they follow and the communities to which they belong.

#### **Identity, Ethnicity, Language and Religion**

Identity refers to the way individuals and groups understand where they belong. Ethnicity may be connected with shared ancestry, history, culture or community. Nationality refers to membership in a political community or state. Language is a means of communication and also helps people preserve cultural memory. Religious identity is another important part of belonging. These terms describe different aspects of identity and should not be treated as the same. A person can have a Pakistani national identity and, at the same time, identify with a particular province, region, language or religious community. In everyday life, these identities often overlap. Recognising these different layers helps us understand social diversity without treating diversity as political division.

#### **Urbanisation and Cultural Interaction**

Urbanisation means the growth of towns and cities and the increasing number of people living in urban areas. Cities such as Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad-Rawalpindi and Peshawar bring together people from different parts of the country. People may move to cities for work, education, family reasons or security. This internal migration creates multilingual workplaces, mixed neighbourhoods and new forms of cultural interaction. People from different backgrounds meet, communicate and share everyday practices. As a result, national integration can grow through interaction without requiring everyone to follow exactly the same cultural practices.



## Languages of Pakistan

### Mother Tongues and Multilingualism

A mother tongue is the language that a person or household identifies as its first or home language. In the census, mother tongue is used as a category for reporting language patterns, but it does not show every language that a person can speak. Multilingualism means using more than one language. It is common in education, employment, trade and urban life. A person may use one language at home, another in education or work, and another for wider communication. Therefore, the census gives useful information about major language groups, while everyday language use can be more varied.

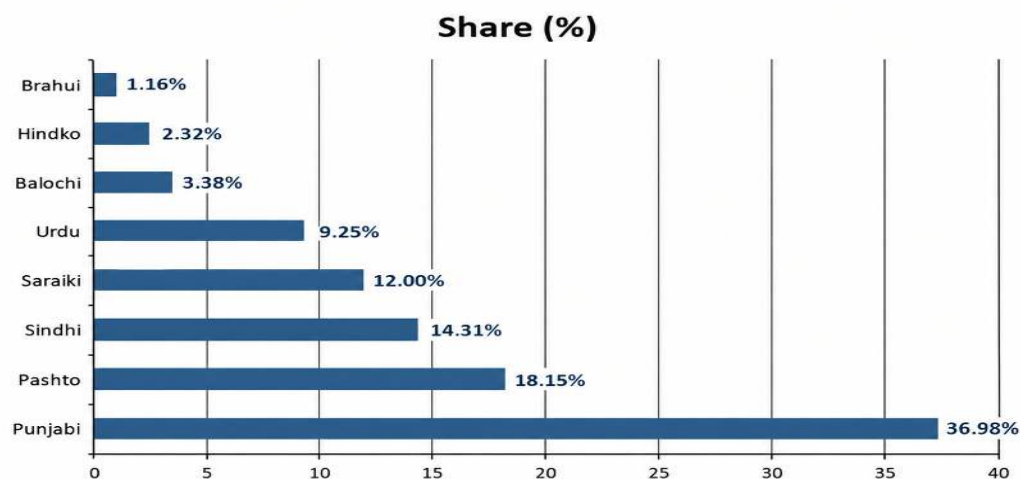
### Urdu and English

Urdu has an important national link-language role in Pakistan. It helps people communicate when they have different first languages. Its use therefore supports communication across regional and linguistic groups. English also has an important role, particularly in higher education, law, administration, business and international communication. Urdu, English and regional mother tongues can therefore serve different purposes. The use of one language in a particular setting does not mean that other languages lose their cultural importance.

### Regional Languages and Cultural Memory

Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Brahui, Saraiki and Hindko carry important regional histories and identities. Shina, Balti, Kashmiri, Khowar, Burushaski, Kalasha, Kohistani and other languages add further linguistic diversity. Languages do more than support everyday communication. They carry poetry, folk tales, social memory and local knowledge from one generation to another. The 2023 Census separately reports several smaller languages, giving them greater statistical visibility. In this way, language is closely connected with both personal identity and cultural heritage.

### Pakistan's major mother tongues, 2023





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#### Language Policy: Integration and Preservation

Urdu serves as a common National language that makes communication easier between people who have different first languages. At the same time, regional-language education and cultural programmes can help maintain local languages. Preservation means keeping a language in use and continuing its transmission, literature and cultural traditions. A multilingual society does not require all citizens to have the same mother tongue. Communication across groups and protection of regional languages can therefore support both integration and cultural diversity.

#### Literature and Intellectual Traditions

##### What Is a Literary Tradition?

A literary tradition is a body of poetry, fiction, drama, criticism, oral literature and other creative works that are passed on within a language or cultural community. Literature can preserve ideas, experiences and emotions that may not appear clearly in official political histories. It can show how people viewed society, relationships, migration, religion, class and major historical events. Pakistan has a multilingual literary heritage. Urdu and regional languages have their own traditions, writers and forms of expression, and together they form an important part of the country's intellectual and cultural history.

##### Major Urdu Literary Figures

Muhammad Iqbal is a major figure in Muslim intellectual thought. His philosophical poetry appeared in Urdu and Persian and dealt with ideas related to thought, society and human life. Faiz Ahmad Faiz is an important modern Urdu poet whose work addressed social and political themes. Saadat Hasan Manto is known for short fiction that examines social realities, Partition and human vulnerability. Qurratulain Hyder is a major Urdu fiction writer whose narratives cover wide historical periods and human experiences. These writers show the variety of themes and styles found in Urdu literary traditions.

##### Regional Literary Traditions

Punjabi literary traditions include Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain and Waris Shah. Sindhi traditions include Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and Sachal Sarmast. Pashto traditions include Khushal Khan Khattak and Rahman Baba. Balochi and Brahui also have strong oral, poetic and historical traditions. Hindko, Shina, Balti, Kashmiri and Saraiki add further literary traditions. These traditions preserve local languages and provide ways of expressing regional history, values, emotions and social experience.

##### Why Literature Matters in Pakistan Studies

Literature provides evidence about social attitudes, emotions and lived experience. Its themes may include love, religion, migration, gender, class, rural life, colonialism, Partition and identity. Literary texts can therefore add another perspective to political and institutional histories. Reading writers in



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their historical context helps students connect cultural expression with social experience. Literature is not only an artistic resource; it can also help us study changing social values, relationships and views of important historical events. The variety of literary traditions also shows that Pakistan's cultural history cannot be understood through one language or one literary tradition alone.

## Religion and Everyday Culture

### Religious Diversity

Religious diversity refers to the presence of multiple religious communities within a society. A religious majority is the largest group, while a religious minority is a smaller community. These categories provide a framework for understanding the religious composition and diversity of Pakistan's population. The 2023 Census records Muslims as 96.35 per cent of the enumerated population in its religion table. It also records Christians, Hindus, Scheduled Castes, Sikhs, Ahmadis, Parsis, and other religious categories.

### Culture in Everyday Life

Culture is expressed through recurring celebrations, inherited practices and everyday social life. Festivals may be religious or regional. Cultural heritage includes music, crafts, stories, food practices, dress and forms of performance that are passed from one generation to another. Eid celebrations, Urs traditions and regional festivals are examples of cultural practices that bring people together and express shared meanings. Everyday cultural practices are not limited to formal celebrations; they are also visible in family life, food, clothing, music and community activities.

### Examples of Pakistani Cultural Heritage

Truck art combines visual design, craft skills and popular expression. Qawwali is an important musical and devotional tradition, while ghazal is an established poetic and musical form. Shandur polo represents a distinctive northern sporting tradition. Regional dances, embroidery, folk tales and traditional food practices also express local identities. These examples show how culture can be experienced through art, music, sport, stories, skills and everyday activities. They also demonstrate how local traditions contribute to the wider cultural heritage of Pakistan.

### Culture and Change

Cultural transmission is the process through which practices, values, skills and knowledge pass between generations or communities. Families, schools, religious institutions, markets and media all contribute to this process. Cultural change occurs when practices and meanings develop over time. Urbanisation, migration, media and global communication can introduce new influences. However, change does not necessarily mean that traditions disappear. Older practices may be adapted, given new meanings or shared through new social settings and media. In this way, continuity and change can exist together in cultural life.



## Diversity, Integration & National Identity

### National Integration

National integration means building social and political connections among citizens across regional, linguistic and cultural differences. Integration does not mean removing regional identities or making every community culturally identical. It depends on equal citizenship, common institutions, social cooperation and interaction among people from different regions. When citizens can participate equally in common national institutions while maintaining meaningful local identities, diversity can become a basis for stronger social connections.

### Identity as Layers of Belonging

Pakistani identity can exist together with province or region, language and local community as overlapping layers of belonging. A person may feel connected to the country, a province, a language group and a local community at the same time. These forms of belonging do not have to compete with one another. Recognising layered identity helps explain how people can maintain meaningful local and regional identities while participating in a shared national political community. National integration can therefore be understood as building connections and shared belonging rather than requiring cultural uniformity.

### Institutions that Connect Citizens

The Constitution and common citizenship provide a shared legal framework for citizens. Education systems and universities bring students and people from different regions into common institutions. Public administration and national markets also connect communities. Media can spread cultural forms across provincial boundaries and make people more familiar with traditions from other regions. Internal migration creates everyday contact among linguistic and regional communities. Together, these institutions and forms of interaction provide opportunities for people with different backgrounds to develop a stronger sense of shared citizenship.

### Diversity and National Unity

Cultural diversity and national unity can exist together. A shared Pakistani identity does not require cultural sameness. Provincial and linguistic identities are meaningful forms of belonging, while equal citizenship and common constitutional institutions provide shared ground. National identity becomes stronger when different identities are understood as overlapping rather than competing categories. Respect for cultural heritage, communication across regions and equal participation in national institutions can help strengthen social unity while allowing diversity to continue.



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